Distr.
GENERAL

UNCTAD/PA/5
20 December 1993

ENGLISH ONLY

STANDING COMMITTEE ON POVERTY ALLEVIATION

SOCIAL MOBILIZATION AND ORGANIZATION OF THE POOR

Background note by the UNCTAD secretariat

GE-93-54599

CONTENTS

		Paragraphs
I.	**Introduction**	1 - 3
II.	**Social mobilization and organization of the poor: rationale and difficulties**	4 - 20
	A. The rationale	7 - 15
	1. Economic rationale	7 - 14
	2. Political rationale	15
	B. The difficulties	16 - 20
	1. Political difficulties	17 - 19
	2. Practical difficulties	20
III.	**Main characteristics and trends of evolving grassroots movements and activities**	21 - 47
	A. Mobilization of the poor	21 - 29
	B. Organization of the poor	30 - 47
	1. Activities around which organizations are created	30 - 37
	2. Internal capacity building and training of group leaders	38 - 42
	3. External liaison required for expansion of activities	43 - 45
	4. Some conditions for success	46 - 47
IV.	**Government policies and measures affecting the participatory process**	48 - 66
	A. Macro-economic policies	49 - 52
	B. Sectoral policies	53 - 55
	1. Agrarian reform	53
	2. Credit for the assetless	54
	3. Urban development policy	55
	C. The institutional framework	56 - 60
	D. Support for replication and multiplication of participatory activities	61 - 66

CONTENTS (continued)

Paragraphs

V. **Relationship between the actors involved in the process** . . . 67 - 90

A. Respective responsibilities of national and local governments, civil development agencies, people's organizations and external institutions . . . . . 67 - 85

1. National and local governments . . . . . 67 - 71
2. Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) . . . . . 72 - 77
3. People's organizations (POs) . . . . . 78 - 80
4. External institutions . . . . . 81 - 85

B. Establishment of mutually supportive relationships between the various actors in participatory development . . . . 86 - 90

1. NGOs and people's organizations . . . . . 86 - 87
2. NGOs and donors 88
3. Relationships between NGOs 89
4. NGOs, POs and government agencies 90

VI. **Conclusion** 91

GLOSSARY

NGO	non-governmental organization
ORAP	Organization of Rural Associations for Progress
PAR	participatory action research
PD	participatory development
PIDA	Participatory Institute for Development Alternatives
PO	people's organization
PRDVL	Planning Rural Development at the Village Level

I. INTRODUCTION

1. The decade of the 1990s has seen poverty alleviation being brought back to centre stage in the development policy debate and emerging as one of the priority development objectives. As poverty is a complex and multidimensional problem with origins in both national and international domains, prescriptions for fighting it are also numerous. Among the anti-poverty policies and programmes, those aimed at social mobilization and organization of the poor in participatory development are considered one of the more effective and sustainable ways for the alleviation of poverty and an essential element of development efforts as a whole. This view is based on both positive and negative considerations: on the one hand, over several decades, social mobilization and organization of the poor in participatory development have evolved from pilot experiments at project level in the 1960s and scattered micro-successes in the 1970s to deliberate policies of replication and multiplication in some countries in the 1980s. These policies have proved to be both valid and effective and have gained international visibility. On the other hand, strategies which did not involve the poor have failed to alleviate poverty, either because a lack of equity in the distribution of resources and incomes has not permitted the growth benefits to trickle down to the poor, or because specific actions for the poor, being implemented in a top-down approach, have proved to be inefficient, costly and therefore not sustainable.

2. Currently, mobilization and organization of the poor are topics that are being widely discussed and debated, mainly at the international and regional levels. The relevance of these topics is expected to be further emphasized at the World Summit for Social Development, to be held in 1995: one of the themes of the Summit is "banking on the poor". However, a gap between international awareness and practical results can be observed: social mobilization and organization of the poor have not as yet been integrated into national policies of many countries, and in some countries "participatory development" is still a term which is relatively ignored.

3. Chapter II of this paper addresses policy and strategy issues raised by this gap, elaborating on rationales for and the difficulties of mobilization and organization of the poor. Chapter III presents the main processes which, by combining an indigenous dynamic with the support of catalysts, leads to the emergency and development of various types of grassroots movements and activities. Chapter IV focuses on government policies and the institutional framework required for facilitating these processes - especially in creating an enabling environment for both NGOs and people's movements. Chapter V deals with the respective responsibilities of and the relationships between the various actors involved in social mobilization and organization of the poor.

II. SOCIAL MOBILIZATION AND ORGANIZATION OF THE POOR: RATIONALE AND DIFFICULTIES

4. There are numerous definitions related to social mobilization and organization of the poor, and so far there is no universally accepted one. This reflects the sensitivity of the different actors concerned and the uncertainties

of the means to achieve mobilization and organization of the poor. A simple and general definition should suffice at the outset of this note.

5. Social mobilization can be defined as a process which builds up confidence of the poor in themselves, through reflection on their own potentials and exploration of social and economic opportunities to improve their status, a process to raise awareness of their social entitlements and economic rights. This process can be initiated by the poor themselves, by NGOs, by local authorities or by the Government.

6. Organization is a process by which the poor get together voluntarily and set up an organizational structure - in many cases around income-generating activities, but also around the delivery of services. An organization of the poor thus constitutes a structure for decision-making and self-management and a body for the safeguarding of members' interests through collective representation. It is a vehicle for collective empowerment. Although usually the basic unit of people's organizations is micro, it can be replicated and multiplied on a larger scale when it functions successfully. Such forms of direct participation, which generate development processes from the grassroots level will be termed "participatory development (PD)".

A. The rationale

1. Economic rationale

7. The background note prepared for the first meeting of the Standing Committee on Poverty Alleviation drew three basic conclusions from the evolution of development approaches and practices[1]: (i) "growth alone has failed to secure a progressive absorption of the poor and the unemployed in the productive sector of the economy"; (ii) "policies targeted at the poor and vulnerable groups of society have not succeeded in improving markedly the human resource base in areas characterized by mass poverty"; and finally (iii) " 'safety nets' have been too onerous, too limited in scope and fraught with too many distortions in their implementation to provide the poorest groups with an effective minimal standard of living". Another conclusion of past experience is that imperfection of markets and social resistance have prevented the poorest from benefiting from the wealth created by growth. A common explanation of the fact that market mechanisms, as well as voluntary actions, have failed to benefit the poor as expected or intended is the lack of mobilization and organization of the poor themselves. This jugement is confirmed by the fact that, in most success stories, the poor were associated in the decisions concerning them.

8. Indeed, even though the poor form a large sector of society and even the majority of the population in some countries, they have a disproportionately small space in society, with almost no voice at all in the decision-making processes and hardly any access to productive assets or development benefits. They are socially, economically and even geographically isolated and tend to be filled with a sense of inferiority, with feelings of hopelessness and despair. Their lives are marked by a daily struggle for survival. As a result, they are not in a position to participate as actors in development or to demand their part of global wealth.

---

[1]/ TD/B/CN.2/3, paragraph 36.

9. In the 1960s and 1970s, the delivery systems for development projects aimed at providing the poor with basic services, or even with employment, were all too frequently marked by top-down approaches and fell short of people's needs and expectations. Development efforts tended to be dominated by large-scale projects whose benefits were often captured by various interest groups and escaped the poor. Even among projects truly aimed at the poor, it was noted that there were often cases where the targets were missed because those who designed or implemented the projects were not familiar with the needs of the poor, thus imposing technocratic models with little involvement of the intended beneficiaries: the latter were thus considered as objects to "receive" development rather than to participate in it themselves.

10. The inefficiency of this approach for preventing or reducing poverty is now largely recognized. On the other hand, the growth of grassroots work aimed at animating and assisting people to take charge of their own lives and to initiate collective development action by mobilizing and organizing themselves is showing more and more potential for alleviating poverty through the release of people's own creativity. Considerable progress has been made towards articulating the conceptual and methodological foundations of such work, as well as towards documenting concrete experiences that reveal the potentials of this approach to development. Participatory development - which started as a little note of dissent in the 1960s with some social activists struggling to find space to work at the grassroots level - has today become a serious, legitimate proposal for the development process.

11. The first call from an intergovernmental agency for participation of the people in the participatory process through organizations of their own choosing came from the International Labour Organization (ILO) at the World Employment Conference in 1975. Today, almost all United Nations and most other intergovernmental bodies are affirming participatory development as a necessary strategy for poverty alleviation.

12. FAO has adopted a "Plan of Action for People's Participation" and elaborated strategies for the promotion of self-help organizations of the poorest. UNICEF's new nutrition strategy specifically stipulates the necessity of involving community members in different stages of the project cycle, namely assessment, analysis and action - in short, the "triple A's". WHO has joined hands with UNICEF in the Bamako initiative which focuses on community decision-making around the financing of improved health services. In fact, most multilateral organizations emphasize the importance of consulting and involving beneficiaries in their projects. IFAD states that "there is a general consensus that participation of the people is desirable because it can reduce the costs of project development and implementation, promote sustainabi'ity and replicability, and take advantage of traditional practices which are especially suited to the environment and the absorptive capacities of the people".[2]

13. The view of the World Bank is that projects tend to be more sustainable and yield higher returns when they involve those they are intended to help. The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) Human Development Report, 1993 is the latest document from a United Nations development agency endorsing participatory development (PD). UNCTAD's Standing Committee on Poverty

---

[2]/ IFAD, The State of World Rural Poverty, p.343.

Alleviation has put social mobilization and organization of the poor on its agenda, and major pronouncements in this direction may be expected from the forthcoming World Summit on Social Development. Bilateral donors are also increasingly showing interest in supporting development efforts through active involvement of the people. Major regional fora such as the Arusha Conference on Popular Participation in the Recovery and Development Process in Africa, in issuing the African Charter on Popular Participation (1990), and ESCAP and SAARC, in endorsing the report of the Independent South Asian Commission on Poverty Alleviation (1992), have all invoked or recognized participatory development in principle as a necessary development strategy.

14. With all these positive trends it is, however, still not obvious that real commitment to participatory development has crystallized in the mainstream of international and national structures to make PD a frontline development strategy, or even a smooth process in its own evolution. Among the intergovernmental agencies, the World Bank, for example, is still at an initial stage, although internal debates are taking place in this respect.[1] Policy commitments notwithstanding, the general handling of operational activities by international agencies of development projects and programmes in this field is still largely dominated by the "top-down" or technocratic approach - a fact which is also true of the typical bilateral projects executed in partnership with national Governments. National authorities, for their part, while they have formally accepted the resolutions of intergovernmental bodies aimed at promotion of participatory development, often have a long way to go in translating such commitments into a credible change of policy and style of operation. It thus appears that the main challenge faced by Governments, as well as by bilateral and multilateral institutions, is to take more and more initiatives which will permit the effective incorporation of participatory development into their policies and operational activities for the alleviation of poverty.

2. Political rationale

15. While poverty has been the fate of a part of mankind for centuries and has been accepted as a fatality, it is now becoming less and less politically acceptable. The spread of democratization in the world and people's growing and legitimate aspirations for greater social cohesion have also led to the recognition that to leave a large section of the population in poverty is unethical and intolerable. On top of this, the fear that poverty could trigger political instability and social unrest is growing. This fear is exacerbated by the breakdown of traditional social linkages in urban areas and by the emergence of the "new poor" - those hit by economic crisis. In this context, mobilization and organization of the poor is a way to avoid the accumulation of frustration and desperation and thus to prevent social disintegration and violence. Besides, mounting constraints on both the state and the international community, market failures and the evolving international economic and political systems induce a change in the role and the balance between state, market and civil organizations, with a clearly manifested inclination to strengthen the latter. Against this background - namely the pull of resource limitations, the pervasiveness of poverty, and the push of changing social and political systems - participatory development is being "rediscovered".

---

[1]/ Bhatnagar, Bhuvan and Aubrey C. Williams (eds), Participatory Development and the World Bank, Potential Directions for Change, World Bank Discussion Papers, World Bank, Washington, USA.

B. The difficulties

16. There are many interpretations of and different practices for social mobilization and organization of the poor. To some it is a means to increase the degree of receptivity and acceptability at the grassroots of development programmes designed by the top. To others, it is both a means and an end: as a means it should enable the poor to initiate actions and participate in development, and as an end the empowered poor will fight for equitable sharing of power and resources. Some think that, with the current political and economic openings, social mobilization and organization of the poor can achieve significant results. Others consider that the existing political and social structure has not evolved sufficiently to allow these people's movements to extend to such a degree that they would have a decisive impact on poverty reduction. The debates which emerge in the literature indicate that there are both political and practical difficulties to the mobilization and organization of the poor. Political difficulties are obvious and are in some way the other face of the political rationale. Practical difficulties flow from the uncertain answers to the question of "how to do it".

1. Political difficulties

17. There is still much skepticism about the current renewed interest in social mobilization and organization of the poor. On the side of pro-poor activists, some fear that social mobilization and organization of the poor can be used as a way to perpetuate exclusion of marginalized civil society from the benefits of development by leaving them to fight alone for a living, thereby freeing national Governments - as well as international institutions - from their responsibilities and relieving scarce public resources. From the government point of view, the apprehension may arise that such mobilization of the poor, by building up political momentum, will require major adaptations of the existing political structure. At a local level, possibilities of confrontation between the organized poor and the elite which lead to local violence do exist, as demonstrated by past and even present examples. The UNDP Human Development Report points out that "participation is a plant that does not grow easily in the human environment. Powerful vested interests, driven by personal greed, erect numerous obstacles to block off the routes to people's political and economic power".[4]

18. Current political, social and economic structures, though quite different from one country to another, are indeed on the whole not very conducive to social mobilization and organization of the poor. As underlined in a document published on behalf of the Administrative Committee on Coordination (ACC) Task Force on Rural Development,[5] "it is a fact that in most countries the dominant relations of power and production and the ideological values legitimizing them constitute powerful structural obstacles to the promotion of popular participation". Furthermore, these obstacles have existed for centuries, being systematized to the last detail, developed into an extremely intricate form, and passed on from generation to generation, both consciously and unconsciously.

4/ UNDP, Human Development Report, 1993, p.28.

5/ Peter Oakley and David Marsden: Approaches to Participation in Rural Development, International Labour Office, Geneva, 1984, p.31.

It is clear, therefore, that resistance to the participation of the poor in development will not disappear overnight.

19. However, as mentioned before, democratization movements which are extending in many regions of the world have opened up new space for participatory development. The possibility for such opportunities to materialize depends both on the political will of those that govern and the capacity of the people to generate and develop their own organizations to promote socio-economic activities and defend their basic rights.

2. Practical difficulties

20. Because of the complexity of the political, economic and cultural factors involved, mobilization and organization of the poor is inevitably a slow and long-term process. At their initial stage, organizations of the poor are generally small and their activities are also of a limited scale. This may raise doubts as to their efficiency. However, non-quantifiable benefits emerging from the process, such as the building up of self-confidence and self-reliance, constitute a major achievement per se. As far as quantifiable achievements are concerned, the difficulties related to the extension of small-scale activities and their replication on a larger scale need to be addressed. This raises the issue of the amount and the sustainability of resources devoted to grassroot activities. On the one hand, the organizations of the poor very often need external support in order to complement the mobilization of their own resources. On the other hand, it has proved to be extremely counter-productive to flood grassroots movements with external resources and/or impose inappropriate terms and conditions for managing them. The development of a sense of dependency on external help can be detrimental to the empowerment process and affect the very survival of the organization, especially when the assistance is substantially reduced and eventually cut off. This is illustrated by the fact that, in successful cases of sustainable and broad-based poverty alleviation efforts, resources come mainly from the poor's own surplus accruing from their productive activities. In addition to the question of financial resources, the lack of access of the poor to basic productive assets and social services can constitute a major obstacle to the success of grassroot initiatives. Such access can be denied because of vested interests and structural inequalities but also for economic reasons. For example, in situations of scarcity, it is usually assumed that productive resources must be allocated to activities having a high rate of return, which may well not be the case of those activities conducted at the grassroots level. As demonstrated in chapter IV, this approach can be contested from a strictly economic point of view. Moreover, investments made in human development directed to the poor produce synergistic effects in the long run by leading to social cohesion - which in turn strengthens the global prosperity of a country.

III. MAIN CHARACTERISTICS AND TRENDS OF EVOLVING GRASSROOTS MOVEMENTS AND ACTIVITIES

A. Mobilization of the poor

21. While people's mobilization for participatory initiatives can happen "spontaneously", in the sense of being stimulated by forces or events within their own environment, external factors often link up with such indigenous

initiatives in order to strengthen and assist them in various ways. These outside agents, to be called "catalysts", usually come from non-governmental organizations. They may also come from those United Nations organizations which promote people's participation through their activities in the field. During the past decade or so, a growing number of development programmes aimed at reaching and benefiting the poor have resorted to specially recruited and trained catalysts.[6] Sometimes particulary motivated officials can assume the role of catalyst in the framework of a genuine decentralization process.

22. Some people think that catalysts will inevitably come from the outside, since locals may be handicapped by kinship obligations and barriers of different kinds, including those generated by powerful interest groups. However, some programmes/projects also have successfully trained and utilized local catalysts. The Domestic Development Service (DDS) programme of the United Nations Volunteers (UNV) has used basically field workers from neighbouring countries, while Asian countries such as Bangladesh and Sri Lanka have successfully used internally emerged or trained catalysts.[7]

23. The initial conjunction between the people and outside catalysts is itself an awareness raiser, since outsiders usually come with information about social and economic rights of the people which might not have been known to them, e.g. legal rights, human rights, rights of tenure on land, rights of women, right to organize. Such information is in part transmitted through preliminary dialogues of outside catalysts with the people. As the relationship between the two is formalized in a systematic effort to promote participatory development, grassroots workshops,"training programmes", etc., are organized for more structured transmission of such information.

24. The greatest educator, however, is the living experience of initiatives and struggle to improve people's lives. Such experience spontaneously raises the awareness of the people. This, however, remains at an individual, subjective level unless objectified by dialogue to become a collective awareness. Outsiders often help enhance this further, by introducing instruments and methods of "animation" which permit a more systematic collective reflection, investigation and analysis, review and evaluation of past and ongoing experiences.

25. A special methodology of animation known as "participatory action research (PAR)", is becoming increasingly popular. In this, outsiders initiate collective social enquiry by and with the people, through which the people investigate and reflect together upon problems affecting their lives with the objective of identifying collective practical action to overcome such problems. PAR has often been initiated where people's lives have been static with no significant mobilization but also where indigenous initiatives and people's organizations have already existed. In either case, the process of collective inquiry has often led to mobilization and collective action where none existed before and intensification and spreading of mobilization and organization where these already existed.

---

[6]/ Norman Uphoff, "Assisted Self-reliance: Working with, rather than for, the poor", in Strengthening the Poor: What have we learned?, Transaction Books, New Brunswick (USA) and Oxford (UK), 1988, p.54.

[7]/ See United Nations Interagency Committee on Integrated Rural Development for Asia and the Pacific, Participatory Rural Development in Selected Countries, Bangkok, 1990, p.151.

26. In Burkina Faso a tradition of mutual cooperation and community work known as "Naam groups" already existed, and some of the Naam groups' own leaders and friends from outside together intervened in the late 1970s to transform these groups into dynamic development forces. This generated the "Six-S" movement which has spread over 33 zones in Burkina Faso with more than 2,000 groups and has also spread to other Western African countries such as Senegal, Mali, Mauritania, Niger and Chad.[8] In Paraguay, agencies have worked in rural areas in the last two decades with a view to stimulating the formalization and reinforcement of pre-existing ties of friendship and kinship among the people and organizing "neighbourhood committees" for the purpose of promoting mutual help and sharing of resources towards meeting the subsistence needs of every family and moving on from there to take up joint economic activities to raise family incomes of close to 3,000 families in four different zones.[9]

27. In Northern Thailand, a network of 10 small locally based development groups called NET has been working in recent years to promote development processes rooted in the traditional culture of mutual cooperation and traditional community organizations in the upper provinces of the region.[10] Animators have worked in the programmes of countless other agencies in many countries to go and intervene in people's lives to stimulate their mobilization and organizational development. Such animation work has even been initiated in experimental government projects in a few countries, for example the Planning Rural Development at the Village Level (PRDVL) project in the United Republic of Tanzania, which started work in 14 villages in three districts in 1986, stimulating the creation of 63 groups in one year and expanding ever since.[11]

28. Examples of participatory action research stimulating people's mobilization and organizational development are: the Change Agents Programme in Sri Lanka, which in the late 1970s sent animators to small producer communities in 14 villages to stimulate people's own collective enquiry into their problem situations, thus generating mobilization and organizational development in a number of these villages; the Organization of Rural Associations for Progress (ORAP) in the Matabeleland and Midland Provinces of Zimbabwe, covering more than 500 villages which grew out of collective social investigation by the villagers

---

[8]/ Egger, Philippe: L'Association Six "S" - se servir de la saison sèche en Savane et au Sahel - et les groupements Naam: note sur quelques observations, ILO, Geneva, February 1987 (mimeographed).

[9]/ Reed, Richard, "Making Paragruay's agricultural 'miracle' work", Journal of Inter-American Foundation, 1985, Vol.9, No.2.

[10]/ Tilakaratna, S., Retrieval of Roots for Self-reliant Development, Some Experiences from Thailand, World Employment Programme Research Working Paper, No.49, ILO, 1989, Geneva.

[11]/ Rahman, Md. Anisur, "Glimpses of the Other Africa", Orlando Fals-Borda and M. A. Rahman (Eds), Action and Knowledge, Breaking the Monopoly with Participatory Action Research, APEX Press.

initiated by a group of intellectual activists after the country's independence[12]; and PAR initiatives of two agencies in southwestern Colombia, which assisted already existing grassroots organizations in the Villarica community in popular investigations into the reported irregularities of the State Electric Company, resulting in social mobilization of the entire community of some 9,000 inhabitants and further organizational development.[13]

29. The use of popular tools for enquiries and for communicating the results, such as popular people's theatre, has widely served as a stimulating awareness-raiser. In the Philippines, for example, an organization of poor women settlers in the province of Luzon used popular drama in a process of review of the settlers' struggle for a better life, knit together information on the struggle in the form of two dramas and invited their community to witness and validate the information. The whole process advanced the community's awareness significantly.[14] Likewise, a community organization of peasants and workers in Kenya, the Kamirithu Community Educational and Cultural Centre, used popular theatre as a tool for the people to "read the world", presenting their lives, history and struggle in a drama which they reviewed and amended several times. Again, the whole experience served as a milestone in advancing people's awareness.[15] In addition to these "alternative" methods of awareness-raising, more formal kinds of "training" courses and workshops are also widely used by outside agencies to give social education to people's leaders and to review ongoing experiences with their collective initiatives.

B. Organization of the poor

1. Activities around which organizations are created

30. As individuals, the poor are next to powerless. They are always in a disadvantageous position when dealing with economic entities or bureaucrats individually. Their organization is a means to reduce their vulnerability. To the outside world, such organizational structures can thus increase the weight of the poor vis-à-vis other forces of society. The World Conference on Agrarian Reform and Rural Development (WCARRD) declares: "... active participation of the poor can only be brought about by adequate people's organizations at the local level." The Human Development Report 1993 also recognized that people can participate more effectively through group action. Such organizations, if functioning successfully, can lend voice to the poor and help them to open up

---

12/ Chavunduka, Dexter M. et al, Khuluma Usenza, The Story of ORAP in Zimbabwe's Rural Development, The Organization of Rural Associations for Progress, Bulawayo; Nyoni, Sithéembiso, "People's Power in Zimbabwe", in Fals-Borda and Rahman (eds.), op.cit..

13/ De Roux, Gustavo, "Together Against the Computor: PAR and the Struggle of Afro-Colombians for Public Service", in Fals-Borda and Rahman, op.cit..

14/ Women's Research Committee, et.al, "The Struggle Towards Self-reliance of Organized, Resettled Women in the Philippines", in Rahman, Md. Anisur, Grassroots participation and self-reliance: Experiences in South and South-east Asia, Oxford and IBH, Delhi, 1984.

15/ Kidd, Ross, "Popular Theatre and Popular Struggle in Kenya: the Story of the Kamiriithu Community Educational and Cultural Centre", Ifda dossier, 33 January/February (1983).

some space for themselves in society; this process will be reinforced by the undertaking of economic activities, as the latter provide a concrete base for the empowerment process.

31. People create organizations to undertake a wide variety of different activities according to local situations and also according to the "ideology" of external agents catalyzing and assisting people's organizations, as well as supporting external donors. The activities are both "economic" and "non-economic" - for example, protest activities against social or physical oppression; pressure group action aimed at promoting access to resources; promotion of human and social rights; improvement of public services, etc., and social and cultural advancement. Activities which generate income, create assets and produce other economic gains will have the greatest appeal,[16] as they meet basic and immediate concerns of the poor. Unlike social activities providing safety nets, which can sporadically alleviate poverty, to help the able-bodied poor to develop their own productive capacity is a more sustainable way to reduce poverty. The following sections draw attention in particular to some imaginative ways by which people's groups and organizations are promoting their economic status and which are not generally conceived or available in conventional externally-designed projects and programmes.

(a) Internal resource mobilization

32. Most people's initiatives are able to stimulate personal savings of the people, no matter how low their incomes are. Members of people's groups and organizations start saving from their earnings, however meagre, and from incremental earnings from economic endeavours undertaken as a part of popular mobilization. The savings are usually put in a collective fund. One of the first benefits that accrues in many cases is a weakening of the vicious circle of dependence on the village money lender, as the collective fund becomes large enough to make reasonable advances or grants to meet acute needs. By experiencing the advantage of these banking and social insurance functions of the collective fund, participating groups are often stimulated into ploughing back a high proportion of incremental incomes to this fund to make it grow at a faster rate.

33. Group savings often involve payments "in kind", for example through the formation of imaginative "banks" such as "rice banks" and "buffalo banks" in Thailand.[17] Rice banks, for example, serve the dual purpose of collective storage and providing advances to members against deposit of rice to save farmers from selling their produce to traders at give-away prices because of lack of storage facilities or liquidity.

34. Some people's groups have developed their saving and credit functions to sophisticated levels, as in the programme of "Impuzamiryango Tuzamuke Twese", an inter-group organization in the Giciye commune of Kabaya district in Rwanda which has set up its own autonomous system of savings and credit, the "Caisse

---

16/ Peter Oakley and David Marsden, Approaches to Participation in Rural Development, International Labor Office (ILO), Geneva, 1984, p.79.

17/ Tilakaratna, S., Retrieval of Roots for Self-reliant Development: Some Experiences from Thailand, World Employment Programme Research Working Paper, No.49, ILO, Geneva.

de Solidarité" (Solidarity Bank), handling deposits of funds, loans to members and the management of external funds for group projects.[18]

(b) Cooperative economic efforts

35. In a sense, another way of mobilizing internal resources is cooperative effort in economic activities. A people's organization is by itself a collective fund of human resources, pooling human energy, physical as well as intellectual, and skills otherwise available for individual pursuits only and, for low income groups, inadequate by definition to meet one's basic needs. Cooperative economic effort is directed in various directions: infrastructure work by way of feeder roads, simple irrigation works, dams and other physical structures; employment and income-generating projects managed collectively, e.g. collective farming, small industries, water management, fisheries, horticulture; collective marketing and storage projects; cooperative consumer goods stores. As an example of innovative initiatives, ORAP in Zimbabwe, as mentioned earlier, starts economic cooperation at a very basic level in so-called "family units" similar in concept to the "neighbourhood committees" of Paraguay. In these family units, each comprising about 10-12 families living in a single neighbourhood, the constituent families work together to help each member household to construct its basic amenities such as wells for drinking water, latrines and improved kitchens. At a higher level, ORAP has a number of "associations" which have constructed "development centres" with assembly halls, market places and appropriate technology workshops. These structures are built through significant voluntary contributions in labour and materials by the people, which supplement external funds. The associations meet in these development centres to make area development plans for the entire set of communities which they represent.

(c) Skills promotion

36. The acquisition of specific skills is a critical prerequisite for more remunerative wage earning or self-employment in various occupations and for raising the productivity of labour, and it is beyond the private means of most low-income groups. People's organizations are solving this problem by initiating skill training programmes of their own, mobilizing internal as well as external resources for this purpose. Selected members of the organizations are also sent to institutional training programmes to come back and train the new skills to other members. A particularly innovative culture of spreading skills from people to people has developed in the Six-S movement mentioned earlier: when some members of Six-S groups master a certain skill or technology, they form a mobile "labour-yard school" to teach the skill to other interested groups.

(d) People's self-evaluation

37. Many people's organizations are engaged in periodic reviews of their own activities, and some use imaginative methods for doing so. A pioneering exercise in people's self-evaluation has recently been reported in which grassroots groups in the Six-S programme in Mali carried out a systematic comparative evaluation of activities in three zones, developing people's own indicators of performance

---

[18]/ Musengimana, Simeon, La dynamique des organisations paysanne au Rwanda: Les cas d'intergroupement Tuzamuke de Kabaya, ILO, Geneva, Februarz 1987 (mimeographed).

specific to each separate activity and in terms of overall objectives, for example the attainment of self-reliance.[19] Even in a movement as advanced as Six-S, this was a milestone in adding rigour to people's self-reflection and an educator for all on how people themselves would assess their own development efforts.

2. Internal capacity-building and training of group leaders

38. People's organizations need to raise their capacity to handle collective tasks which they have not experienced before. Some areas in which they need to raise their capacity are: literacy and accounting; organization and facilitation of group deliberation processes; the administration of savings, collective funds and loan operations; technical skills needed to administer the various economic and social activities; collective investigation of issues and problems; planning, monitoring and collective self-review and evaluations of completed or ongoing activities.

39. Most outside agencies animating and assisting people's collective initiatives have capacitation or training programmes for leaders and representatives of people's groups to equip them with knowledge and skills relevant to the groups' activities. Some big agencies maintain qualified staff of their own to impart such training, as well as to assist concrete activities initiated by the people. Others supplement their own expertise with experts from outside to assist in training in specific areas.

40. Many such training programmes predominantly use conventional top-down methods of training such as class-room lecturing or seminars tailed by question-and-answer type exchanges. Through such methods knowledge is supposed to be "transferred". Others have departed from such methods and are introducing "dialogical" methods of training which use mutual experiences and generate a collective search for answers. In such methods, knowledge is "created" through an interaction of scientific and popular knowledge. Dialogical sessions, however, may also fail to involve people's leaders as "equals" and sometimes even degenerate into one-way teaching because of insufficient sensitivity or skills on the part of outside experts to truly facilitate such sessions rather than to dominate and because of insufficient mental strength on the part of people's leaders to assert themselves.

41. It should be mentioned that outside knowledge is not necessarily irrelevant for participatory initiatives. The point at issue here is that the poor must have the possibility to seek and find answers to questions that may arise in the future, by themselves or in interaction with outside knowledge which they may choose themselves.

42. The above kind of concern is growing in committed grassroots work and PD thinking, and the very term "training" is increasingly being rejected, replaced by terms like "knowledge sharing and generation"[20] and in an African vernacular

---

[19]/ Egger, Philippe, "Peasant groups evaluate their development actions: A self-evaluation experience from Mali", Toward Self-Development, Evaluation of Development by People, S. Tilakratna (ed.), ILO, Geneva, 1991 (mimeographed).

[20]/ Ver Hagen, Koenraad, Self-help Promotion, A Challenge to the NGO Community, CEBEMO/Royal Tropical Institute, The Netherlands, p.111.

(one of the Bantu languages of South Africa) "ugiolana" or "building each other", and "uakana" or "sharpening each other".[21] However, the methodology of such alternative modes of knowledge generation is yet to mature in grassroots work. Perhaps it should be viewed as a process, rather than a methodology, to evolve itself from interaction between outsiders and the people. One agency, the Fomento de Iniciativas Economicas in Bolivia, is known in particular for its continuously open and creative approach to this question; it has fully rejected the concept of the transfer of knowledge through "training", recognizes its own "immaturity" in the art of capacitation and is engaged in a continuous search for "liberating pedagogy" and self-critique using feedbacks from the field and creative reorientation of its pedagogy as well as redesigning of educational materials to continue improving in this challenging task.[22]

3. External liaison required for expansion of activities

43. Activities which people's groups undertake or desire to undertake often require support from public agencies in charge of specific resources (e.g. fertilizer or pesticides, seeds for agriculture) or extension services, registration and sanctioning authorities, etc. Support is also often needed from semi-autonomous institutions or centres dealing with technical assistance or training in various specific areas. Support from authorities or officials wielding power and status is also a source of strength if people's efforts to promote their socio-economic status invite resistance from vested interests. In sharply polarized societies, attempts to promote people's mobilization and organization often invite harsh responses from vested interests, and in such cases seeking allies within public agencies and attempts to explain the rightness of people's actions to appropriate authorities become important parts of the activities themselves. Support from legal groups, human rights and women's rights groups, and journalists often becomes important in carrying out activities that face resistance from vested interests.

44. In the initial phases, at least, of the life of a people's organization, the people themselves do not have easy access to such agencies and quarters, nor would they in general have the know-how to deal with them. Catalytic agencies who come to animate people's mobilization take the responsibility, therefore, of providing this liaison service as a "facilitating" function.[23] Such a liaison service is also sometimes provided by influential friends of the people residing in their neighbourhood, such as a school teacher or a rural doctor, who may become a spontaneous ally of the people in their collective activities. It should be considered desirable that over time people's organizations develop the capacity to liaise directly with the relevant quarters. This has happened in some cases, particulary where the external agency has had a serious policy of withdrawal from a specific location where it intervenes to promote or assist grassroots initiatives, e.g. in the work of Participatory Institute for Development Alternatives (PIDA) in Sri Lanka, working in 10 village clusters, and a number of catalytic agencies in Thailand. Some agencies, for example the

---

[21]/ Rahman, Md. Anisur, "Towards an alternative development paradigm", Bangladesh Journal of Political Economy, Vol.II, No.2, (1991(a)), A Conference Issue, Dhaka, Bangladesh.

[22]/ Calvo, Luz Maria, Cuatro Experiencias de Animacion en Bolivia, Working Paper No.52, ILO, Geneva.

[23]/ Tilakaratna, S (1989), op.cit., pp.35-38.

Movimiento de Organizacao Communitaria (MOC) of Brazil, do have a conscious policy of encouraging and equipping people's organizations to liaise directly with state or parastatal organizations. But many catalytic agencies have neither withdrawn nor have a conscious policy of preparing grassroots organizations to be able to liaise directly with outside agencies, and have retained this function for themselves.

45. Liaison between people's organizations themselves is one of the most important tools for increasing the strength of these organizations and for mutual learning. Many sets of people's organizations have indeed formed broader federations or networks across villages, towns and provinces and even across national boundaries. However, examples of people's organizations in the programmes of different catalytic agencies in the same country linking with each other to form broader autonomous people's organizations or networks are hard to find. This is a very important question in people's empowerment and in enhancing the macro significance of grassroots initiatives, to which we will return later.

4. Some conditions for success

46. The participatory initiatives referred to in this chapter are some of the most "successful" ones and ones with innovative features, bearing in mind that any notion of "success" must be open to many questions, some of which will be raised in subsequent chapters. "Success" has often depended on careful choices of "entry point", in terms of both space and nature of intervention. Starting work first in less polarized communities has made progress relatively easier, and the demonstration of success has helped extend work in more sensitive areas. People's own initiatives have been sparked off more easily, and their solidarity sustained, when external intervention has first stimulated people's own collective enquiry and reflection on the conditions of their life and possibilities of improving them by collective action and internal resource mobilization, rather than coming with external advice and substantial external resources as a starter. Success in promoting self-aware and self-assertive people's organizations has depended critically on the personal style of external animators in relating with the people and on the pedagogy of "training" to raise their awareness and capacities: efforts to develop a "subject-subject" mode of interaction without an air of "vanguardist" superiority, and a pedagogy of "training" as discussed earlier that invites people's self-search for answers rather than giving them answers to questions, have usually made the crucial difference. The ability of external intervenors to provide vital technical support or guidance toward the implementation of economic activities chosen by the people have been critical when such support has been needed for the success of projects. Likewise, the skill of external intervenors has sometimes been a decisive factor in keeping participatory initiatives moving in the face of opposition from various powerful interest groups.

47. With such strategies, approaches and skills, PD work has moved forward over the last two decades, often having to overcome difficult obstacles, to claim serious consideration today in the global search for an approach to development which can alleviate poverty. The fuller realization of the potentials of PD will depend both on genuine political commitment of Governments to give it the needed policy support and on the PD movement itself deepening its conceptions and aiming at higher standards. The next two chapters are designed to suggest issues and questions for deliberation in these directions.

IV. GOVERNMENT POLICIES AND MEASURES AFFECTING THE PARTICIPATORY PROCESS

48. In the past two decades or so there has been a decline in the power of the State because of the economic and political changes that have been taking place. The trend has been - as pointed out in the report of the Secretary-General of the United Nations to the World Summit for Social Development (E/193/77) - towards a notion of the State more as enabler or facilitator and less as provider. Nevertheless, this does not free national Governments from the responsibility of supporting social mobilization and organization of the poor, as such responsibility cannot simply be passed on to NGOs or any other groupings emerging from civil society. The State thus has a specific role to assume, without which the full potential for social mobilization and organization of the poor in poverty alleviation cannot be realized. Political will at the highest level is required to exert such responsibility effectively. It is essential for tackling structural problems of inequity, giving priority to poverty-focused policies and programmes, reorienting delivery systems towards the needs of the poor, and providing a legal framework for grassroots and community-based organizations, including constitutional recognition of the freedom of association. Along these lines, the role and responsibility of the State in participatory development is examined below in relation to three main policy areas: (i) the macro-economic environment; (ii) sectoral policies; and (iii) the institutional framework.

A. Macro-economic policies

49. Poverty in most developing countries is a macro phenomenon and needs to be tackled with a macro development strategy. Poverty alleviation policies and measures usually constitute a down-stream remedial action. It is important that macro-economic policies support such action. If up-stream activity keeps producing new poor, absorbs all development benefits or does not give any economic space for participatory development, efforts for downstream action will definitely be watered down or even stifled completely.

50. When economies contract, the number of poor increases, while the situation of those who are already poor is aggravated. Sustained economic growth, therefore, is an essential condition for alleviating poverty. Furthermore, it provides an enabling environment and the necessary means for promoting sectoral, meso- and micro-policies directly aimed at reducing poverty.

51. However, it is important to bear in mind that opportunities opened up by dynamic growth will not automatically benefit the poor. Especially in those countries characterized by sharp inequalities in the ownership of and access to productive resources, the impact of global growth on poverty alleviation cannot be impressive. Even in those countries where polarization is less extreme, the poor may not have the environment needed to make best use of the opportunities offered by such a growth process. It is therefore necessary to promote policies which will permit the poor to be, themselves, agents of growth. In this respect, the Independent South Asian Commission on Poverty Alleviation has taken the view that the growth potential in the countries of the region lies in the hands of the low-income producers, provided they are mobilized for participatory development. This assessment rests on the growing evidence that, thus mobilized, the poor show high marginal savings rates, a low capital/output ratio (because

of greater labour intensity in their activities), sharing and caring characteristics that reduce the cost of meeting their basic needs, and values of "simplicity and frugality". The Commission therefore recommended a net transfer of resources to the poor, which should be implemented through policies such as fiscal measures aimed at redistribution of resources; market support policies aimed at ensuring a fair return to people's initiatives so that the surplus remains in their hands for reinvestment; an import policy designed to protect indigenous production from unequal competition in the initial stages; a bank-lending policy designed to give preferential treatment to small group enterprises self-managed by direct producers; and more generally, any policy bringing changes in access to productive resources and income distribution in favour of the poor.

52. These policies and measures need to be tailored to the specific situation of each country, taking into account their structural characteristics such as the magnitude of poverty, the respective weight of the formal and informal sectors of the economy, and the degree of opening to the outside. The design of structural adjustment programmes can be examined against this background, with an assessment of their ability to promote a pattern of growth which does not marginalize the poor in the production process.

B. Sectoral policies

1. Agrarian reform

53. The need for agrarian reform to ensure the access of direct producers to agricultural assets, to remove the worst forms of agrarian exploitation and to give agrarian workers and the peasantry a secure basis from which to take initiatives, is recognized.[24] While most countries are signatories to international commitments on this question, much remains to be done by way of implementation. One reason is that there is often resistance from powerful agrarian interests. In fact, paradoxically, the international awakening and often pressure toward democratization in developing countries have in some cases brought into national power forces representing these very interests. In such cases, the democratic process is not by itself sufficient to promote participatory development. In many countries, agrarian reforms still remain a basic condition for reducing rural poverty. Experience shows that, where they have been implemented successfully, such reforms have brought both more equity through land redistribution and a significant increase in agricultural productivity through changes in land tenure systems and introduction of technological progress.

2. Credit for the assetless

54. Another reform should be on the agenda today. Numerous and various types of mutual credit groupings at the local level, sometimes extended on a larger scale, have convincingly demonstrated that a sound credit policy does not necessarily require material collateral; group liability and field supervision together provide excellent security for credit to the assetless or asset-poor, who demonstrate repayment records surpassing the average repayment records of affluent borrowers. In view of this experience, credit for the assetless, even for productive investment, should not be funded only by limited donor grants supporting these initiatives. The regular banking institutions should also be

---

[24] See, for example, The Peasant Charter, FAO, 1981.

involved through appropriate reforms in this sector. In most cases, the traditional procedures of commercial banks do not lend themselves to the kind of intensive field service required to handle lending to the assetless. These procedures need to change, and bank staffs need to be trained accordingly.

3. Urban development policy

55. Grassroots interventions and initiatives have been concentrated more in rural than in urban areas. One reason for this, perhaps, is that urban life is more atomized, with individual families more dissociated with each other in daily life, working less "in the open" to be able to relate to each other at a human and cultural level, in order to develop actually or potentially a sense of common solidarity and mutual share and care. However, there are numerous collective action projects among slum dwellers in urban areas in Asia, Latin America and Africa, undertaken by informal sector associations and groupings, and formed around productive activities, services and social support systems. Where the urban sector does not show an economic growth dynamism of its own which can economically justify its rapid extension, there is a need for policies to check the flow of people to urban areas by giving priority to rural development, including rural industrialization. This may be combined with a policy of encouraging group entrepreneurship to promote participatory development in rural industries and to tap the economic potentials of group cooperation among small producers. In countries where a large fraction of the population, including the poor, are already living in urban areas, policies to encourage group enterprise and worker self-management could activate participatory development in urban industry. This should, in particular, be seriously considered in those countries where more conventional types of private entrepreneurship are not forthcoming at the desired rate or are not showing the desired efficiency.

C. The institutional framework

56. Participatory development does lend itself to informal group activities, but a legal framework granting formal legal status to participatory organizations is important in protecting their activities from unwarranted harassment, in giving security to their members, in executing contracts, and in giving them solid social status. Such a legal framework is indispensable for favouring the emergence and spread of various groups initiating grassroot activities or supporting them. For example, in order to get credits from institutional sources and benefit from governmental projects and policies, it is desirable for these grassroots organizations to obtain appropriate legal status through the necessary procedures. In so doing, wider recognition will be won from society at large.

57. Such status needs to be complemented by decentralization of administrative authority to facilitate and support PD at local levels. Local governments are closer to the poor, at least in a physical sense, and have a stake in local development. There is strong evidence that many of the most successful projects began with close leadership ties with local government or with elites. Generally speaking, therefore, decentralization can enhance the opportunities for popular participation, better resource allocation and more public services.[25] Local officials and politicians can be more open to direct public scrutiny than

---

[25]/ International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD), The State of World Rural Poverty, p.343.

national Governments and more accountable to the communities and individuals they are supposed to serve.[26] Local Governments - being closer to the people - have a natural claim for greater authority to decide upon local-level development priorities in consultation with people's organizations, to plan with the people the mobilization of resources, including taxes, as well as resources that the people will mobilize and spend themselves on development, and to execute local-level government projects with the active participation of the people.

58. Difficult questions still exist in this regard. Decentralization makes the local official a key actor in local development. The question of making this official work with the people and accountable for supporting PD remains, and mechanisms for this need to be devised. One mechanism used in several countries to make local officials accountable to the "people" consists of councils of elected representatives of local communities. Another mechanism for promoting the accountability of local officials would consist in forming "steering" or "advisory" bodies for local-level development comprising, in addition to formally elected representatives of communities, representatives of the people's organizations, locally based NGOs and persons and institutions enjoying community respect.

59. In general, successful decentralization requires bodies and communication procedures permitting an ongoing collaboration between local officials, representatives of NGOs and people's movements. In such a framework, delegation of resources can effectively provide increased means to support grassroot initiatives for poverty alleviation.

60. It is necessary to point out, however, that decentralization is not an answer to all problems posed by efforts to alleviate poverty. As mentioned earlier, there are important sectors where central interventions have been found to be effective in serving the same purpose in a complementary way.

D. Support for replication and multiplication of participatory activities

61. The replication of participatory activities is taken to mean not creating an exact replica of activities elsewhere, but initiating new processes by following the same general principles and approaches which have been followed elsewhere. Multiplication means more spontaneous spreading of initiatives, through demonstration or by participatory groups themselves motivating and assisting other people in the neighbourhoods to start such initiatives. Lessons leant from the replication of projects by the FAO People's Participation Programme are that replication can be pursued in one of three ways: (a) through expansion of project activities in adjacent areas; (b) through multiplication, i.e. the launching of similar projects in other areas of the country; (c) through the introduction of participatory components in larger-scale rural development projects and programmes.[27]

62. Governments can support the replication and multiplication of participatory initiatives in various ways: they can arrange for documentation and publication

---

[26]/ UNDP, Human Development Report 1993, p.66.

[27]/ Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, Participation in Practice, p.39

of stimulating cases; help build the capacity of people's organizations to document and publicize their efforts through popular methods; provide funding and logistical support for mutual study tours among grassroots groups and national tours of leaders of advanced initiatives to propagate and motivate others to join the movement; provide support to "advisory work" of leaders from advanced initiatives to assist other people to form groups, raise their awareness and manage group activities; and support "training" programmes, university courses, etc., to increase the supply of field animators. Such support for the replication and multiplication of participatory initiatives would, indeed, establish Governments as active partners in efforts to promote organizations of the poor and PD.

63. By becoming an active partner in the spreading of PD in various ways as suggested above, Governments may reduce the possibilities of resistance from vested interests and thus extend the space of replication and multiplication. But replication should not be seen as a matter merely of availability of space. In addition there are questions of supply of scarce animation skills of quality, as well as of resource support for replication. Cases are known where too fast a pace of replication of a PD programme has reduced its average quality because the supply of the requisite animation skills has not increased as fast. Priority in such cases needs to be given to raising the supply of such skills before replication of PD initiatives on a wide scale. However, PD initiatives using a lot of external resources may not be widely replicable simply because of the lack of the proportionately higher level of such resources required or because of the undesirability of getting into donor dependence on such a scale for PD work. This question of the quality of PD initiatives is a question in its own right which will be taken up again later.

64. A final question in relation to replication concerns the issue of spatial strategy for replication, to which very little attention has so far been given in deliberations on participatory development.

65. Many catalytic agencies have spread their work over significant spatial areas, with some covering thousands of villages. But in general, in each specific locality (e.g. a village), only a small proportion of the low-income households are involved in their programmes. The reasons for this apparent preference for covering a greater and greater number of geographical units rather than a larger number of households in the same unit have not been well discussed, but questions can be raised on such a spatial strategy for the spread of PD from at least three points of view. First, working with a small proportion of disadvantaged people in a community and helping to improve their conditions may actually increase the misery of the rest of such members of the community whose relative position thereby worsens. Secondly, such a strategy of replication may not have an impact anywhere on the overall development dynamics of the localities concerned, remaining a marginal phenomenon in the new locations. Finally, such a strategy keeps the groups in the respective programmes weaker vis-à-vis vested interests than if there were more such groups in the same community or neighbourhood to strengthen each other.

66. Accordingly, in many cases, participatory initiatives need first to be consolidated where they have emerged, with the support of catalytic agencies and local authorities, before being extended or replicated in other places.

V. RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE ACTORS INVOLVED IN THE PROCESS

A. Respective responsibilities of national and local governments, civil development agencies, people's organizations and external institutions

1. National and local governments

67. The responsibility of governments in terms of adopting strategic policies to expand the space for PD initiatives has been discussed in the previous chapter. An important question for governments is whether governments - national and local - should directly engage in grassroots organizing work.

68. The formal position with regard to established workers' organizations has been negative, on the grounds that people's organizations would then not have the needed autonomy.[28] As for participatory development, governments as a rule have not directly engaged in catalytic work chiefly because this is a relatively new aspiration and culture on which clear policies have yet to be defined, and a culture, moreover, of development action in which bureaucracies traditionally have had little initiation.

69. There are, however, examples of government agencies doing catalytic work at the grassroots level to promote PD through experimental pilot exercises. These experiments provide interesting insight into the problematic this raises. In 1981, the Bureau of Rural Workers in the Philippines Ministry of Labour launched a pilot project called Sarilakas ("own strength") in four areas of the country. After about a year and a half of rather impressive work,[29] the staff of the project decided to form an NGO to continue the work in view of bureaucratic hindrances they felt were coming in their way. Today, this NGO called PROCESS (Participatory Research and Organization of Communities Through Self-Education and Self-help Activities) is perhaps the largest non-church-based civil development agency in the country, working in some 400 or so villages and towns in several provinces, owing its origin to a government initiative. Likewise, the PIDA of Sri Lanka mentioned earlier also emerged out of a pilot exercise called the "Change Agents Programme" of the Ministry of Rural Development, some of whose field workers also felt the need to form an NGO to continue the work more "freely". Finally, the PRDVL project in the United Republic of Tanzania (see chapter III above) has been cited as an outstanding example of a government project promoting people's self-reliance.[30] In view of the various experiences, the question does not seem to be totally closed as to whether a committed government agency may directly engage in catalytic work to promote social mobilization and organization of the poor.

---

[28]/ ILO, Rural Employers' and Workers' Organizations and Participation, ILO, Geneva, 1979 (prepared for the Advisory Committee on Rural Development, ninth session).

[29]/ Rahman, Md. Anisur (1983), SARILAKAS, a Pilot Project for Stimulating Grass-roots Participation in the Philippines, Technical Cooperation Evalulation Report, ILO, Geneva.

[30]/ ILO (1989), Promoting People's Participation and Self-reliance, proceedings of the Regional Workshop of Trainers in Participatory Rural Development, Bulawayo, 21 August-1 September 1989, Geneva.

70. It may be borne in mind that governments in any case are executing a lot of development projects and programmes with substantial funds, particularly in countries receiving substantial amounts of foreign development assistance. There is a real dilemma here in that on the one hand the desirability of government bureaucracies doing direct grassroots organizing work and their competence to do so are under question; on the other hand the substantial amounts of development resources at the command of governments may continue to promote non-participatory development if governments are not directly engaged in PD work.

71. Local governments with limited staff and funds and, in principle, working more directly with the people can, if they are so motivated, use a substantial part of their resources to promote and support PD initiatives. An outstanding instance was seen in Bangladesh shortly after its independence, where in 1973 the Agricultural Office of the local government in the northern district of Rangpur launched a "self-reliance movement" in which villagers took oaths not to seek any grants from outside and to mobilize their own resources and energies for village development.[31] The movement spread to 60 villages before it got into political trouble in 1975. Other examples of committed local officials working with or even initiating participatory people's action exist, though they have been less documented. There is need, it seems, for documentation of such cases in order to assess more competently the question of local government agencies taking direct action to promote social mobilization and organization of the poor.

2. Non-governmental organizations (NGOs)

72. To work as catalytic agents to promote participatory development has almost become a prerogative of NGOs, and foreign donor support for their activities is progressively increasing. This is resulting in a "mushrooming" of NGOs in several countries, creating hopes as well as worries in concerned quarters.

73. The hopes lie in the impressive work that some NGOs are doing, of the kind referred to in chapter III. The worries are for several reasons: the work of different NGOs is of uneven quality and scope: some NGOs carry out small and scattered projects which have a limited impact, while others have become large bureaucracies, with sometimes hundreds of professional and administrative personnel, and their own quality of work varies widely depending upon the personal motivation of the field staff rather than on effective central vision. In some cases, the increasing flow of donor funding for grassroots work may also lead to the formation of new NGOs, more as a job-creating enterprise than out of deeper social motivation.

74. The grassroots work of many NGOs, even among those which are promoting vibrant participatory processes, has not always succeeded in enhancing the independence of the people's organs vis-a-vis the NGOs, which are in principle supposed to be doing catalytic work but may actually have helped to create a new patron-client relationship with the people. The latter, for their part, are clinging to such agencies for continuous support and guidance, while donor support for people's initiatives may also in some cases, because of its scale and duration, hinder the achievement of the desired autonomy.

---

[31]/ Rahman, Md. Anisur (1993), The Lost Moment, Dreams with a Nation Born Through Fire, University Press Ltd., Dhaka, Bangladesh.

75. Finally, some NGOs exhibit an "empire" mentality that may act as a barrier to the networking of people's organizations within a country or region. As a result, the formation of broad-based federations is rarely encouraged, while the people's organizations themselves have sometimes their own difficulties in coming together, missing the opportunity to become a larger collective with a unified voice.

76. All this leads to one basic question: to whom are the NGOs accountable ? They are clearly accountable to their donors, who are mostly foreign agencies. In most countries there is in principle some accountability to Governments through procedures such as registration and granting of permission to receive foreign funds. In practice, however, some Governments yield to donor pressures, albeit reluctantly, to allow NGOs to do grassroots work while they themselves remain uncomfortable about this.

77. The question is then to set up a form of accountability of NGOs, while at the same time respecting their autonomy and specificity. In order not to stifle their innovativeness, one might suggest the formation of some kind of moral authority as a loose guide to NGO work, for example a national body comprising representatives from NGOs, people's organizations, the Government, scientific professions, etc.. Such a body would not seek to control NGO work in any way, but suggest principles and standards of work in view of the specific conditions and aspirations of the society, follow up grassroots work with critical analysis which might be passed on to concerned NGOs for consideration, perhaps also pass on to them responsible views of other quarters in society, and invite NGOs to present analytical documentation of their work and experience, discussing both successes and failures from which others could learn and seek not to make the same mistakes.

3. People's organizations (POs)

78. Although NGOs are to play a crucial role in promoting the awareness and capabilities of people's organizations (POs), the basic responsibility for participatory development rests by definition with the people. As we have noted in the previous section, the very strength of PD in the struggle to establish its own claim as a development strategy rests not merely on its ability to alleviate poverty for humanitarian reasons, but also on its contribution to the overall growth of the economy. Moreover, since external resources to promote mobilization and organization of the poor are scarce, the case for assisting particular groups of low-income people to improve their lives in the context of widespread poverty could be considered to be weak unless the people thus assisted were to share the responsibility for assisting others, i.e. by spreading PD in their own respective neighbourhoods.

79. Responsibility means, in the first place, that POs should show efficiency in the management of production and other socio-economic activities, as well as high marginal saving rates. Secondly, responsibility means that people's organizations must meet the challenge of assuming leadership roles in performing animation work with other disadvantaged people and assisting them with the experience, skills and even resources gained by being assisted by NGOs in the first instance. In many grassroots movements, POs are indeed playing such "spearhead" roles, but the concept needs to be ingrained in PD work as one of its essential and challenging elements. POs must also develop the awareness that they need to become progressively self-reliant vis-à-vis NGOs in order to release

scarce NGO resources and manpower for catalytic work in other locations.

80. Wider social fora, as suggested above, can help in promoting such spearhead roles and self-reliance awareness among POs. In addition, participatory development courses might be introduced in centres of higher learning with a view to giving scientific depth to the understanding of tasks and challenges, and the art, in this field.

4. External institutions

81. By external institutions is meant here institutions of foreign origin which are supporting grassroots work in a country by funding NGOs or doing direct grassroots work themselves. Both these kinds of external institutions operate in developing countries.

82. Questions can be raised on foreign agencies doing direct grassroots work in a developing country. There is a question of cultural difference and of the understanding of expatriates in general of the indigenous culture in which participatory initiatives of the people must be rooted. On the other hand, the involvement of foreign agencies may in some cases provide valuable support to the people taking participatory initiatives. The risk that the people involved remain dependent on such protection for a long time should be taken into account in this type of cooperation. Finally, the question of sensitivity of foreign agencies working directly with the people, which tend to come with their own "ideology of development", needs to be addressed.

83. There may be a lack of critical skills in a developing country essential or useful for PD work, and foreign agencies possessing the requisite skill or know-how may assist in raising national knowledge and know-how in such areas, e.g. animation work, participatory research, grassroots credit management, improved farming or water management. Such knowledge may be transmitted through "training" programmes or even by practical demonstration in small scale projects, with the foreign agency withdrawing from the area after national or local capability has been created.

84. Foreign agencies funding the work of national NGOs raise a different set of issues. The increasing supply of foreign donor funding to support grassroots work is inviting the creation of NGOs, some of which may not have a real commitment to poverty alleviation and participatory development nor the requisite capability and experience for work of quality. And as suggested already, PD work which is too dependent on foreign donor funding tends to result in activities that may not be sustainable or replicable on a wide scale. For their part, some donors themselves are subject to pressures of their own to spend funds, often large amounts, on poverty alleviation through NGOs, and cases of overfunding are known which have disoriented the work of their local partners.

85. The challenge for foreign donor agencies is then to find the appropriate rythmn of funding, to be sensitive to the culture and specific situation of the local "milieu" and to promote forms of cooperation accordingly, with a view to supporting NGOs and people's movements without stifling their autonomy and original character. Finally, the responsibility that foreign donors have in influencing the direction of participatory development in countries where the external support for grassroots work is massive needs to be underlined. It raises

again the question of accountability and of the need for establishing fora where people's participation in policies for poverty alleviation can be openly discussed by all actors concerned.

B. Establishment of mutually supportive relationships between the various actors in participatory development

1. NGOs and people's organizations

86. We have previously referred to the principle of establishing a "subject-to-subject" relation between the catalytic agency and the people, so that the people have the needed confidence to think, decide and act for themselves. The question, basically, is to give to the people a sense of real partnership in a situation in which they are dependent on "friends" from outside to help them improve their lives. Their state of literacy and knowledge of the external world that affects their lives are usually inferior; so is their command over strategic resources and contacts. In this milieu of unequal abilities, one needs to look for new attitudes and approaches which can increase the people's self-confidence: what are the areas in which both their present capacity and their potential can be fully recognized ? Can people be identified by those qualities and not be called, repeatedly, only "poor" ? Can they be shown respect for those qualities rather than sympathized with for what they lack ? Can they be invited to train NGO workers in what they know better, and even to question the conduct of the external animators and to participate in the "policy board" of the NGO itself?

87. The last question, actually, is the litmus test of the ultimate commitment of NGOs to developing a truly subject-subject relationship with the people, i.e. to accept accountability to the people's organizations whose creation and development they animate and assist. In general, the structures of catalytic agencies are separate from the structures of people's organizations, and the former are not institutionally accountable to the latter. On the contrary, catalytic agencies carry out evaluation of the work of people's organizations without returning the compliment by inviting the POs to evaluate the conduct of NGOs. Such an assymetry can be rectified with a view to establishing a genuine "partnership" relationship. This is already being done by certain organizations like ORAP and Six-S in Africa, the apex bodies of which include both people's representatives and external activists. In such cases a dichotomy between people's structures and the structures of catalytic agents does not exist, and the relation between the people and these agents becomes an internal question for the overall movement.

2. NGOs and donors

88. The relationship between NGOs and their donors may also not be conducive to the development of real partnership. In this respect, it needs to be recognized that in several developing countries NGOs have failed to obtain fuller social support for their work precisely because of their near total dependence on foreign donors. This dependency can be reduced by diversifying the sources of funding or finding new forms of financing. This is the case, for example, of the African Centre for Human Development, a "self-reliant" NGO which raises the bulk of its funds by engaging in various enterprises and consultancy.[1] In

---

[1] ILO (1989), Promoting People's Participation and Self-reliance.

3. Relationships between NGOs

4. NGOs, POs and Government agencies

VI. CONCLUSION

91. The questions raised in this note are being intensively debated by the various agents committed to the promotion of people's participation - both as an efficient way for alleviating poverty and as a basic element for strengthening current democratic processes. The political climate is propitious to the active pursuit of this debate at all levels: local, national, regional and international. This should lead to a more effective integration of participatory development in the evolving strategies of countries and international institutions. On both sides it requires above all a strong political will, a spirit of openness in order to perceive the basic needs and aspirations of all people, especially the poor, and an imaginative search to find appropriate ways to relate with them and to support their own efforts to alleviate and eventually eliminate poverty.